

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT SANA 4126 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO JIDDA
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OCT 19.
QUOTE S E C R E T SANA 4126

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: GHASHMI THE MAN

BEGIN SUMMARY: SEVERAL EMBASSY OFFICERS, INCLUDING
AMBASSADOR, KNOW GHASHMI RATHER WELL AND LIKE HIM.
CABLE BELOW DRAWS ON THESE AND OTHER SOURCES FOR PICTURE
OF POLITICAL AND PERSONAL CHARACTER OF NEW PRESIDENT. WHAT
WE KNOW ABOUT HIM-- PARTICULARLY IN PRESENT UN-
SETTLED SITUATION --- MAKES US QUESTION HIS POWERS
OF SURVIVAL. WE WOULD GROW MORE SKEPTICAL
OF HIS ABILITY TO SURVIVE IF WE THOUGHT HE ACTUALLY
KILLED HIS COLLEAGUE AND PREDECESSOR. IN ANY CASE,
GUILTY OR INNOCENT, HE MAY WELL PRESIDE OVER
INTERLUDE IN MODERN YEMENI HISTORY WHICH IS RATHER
BRIEF AND UNSETTLED.WE HAVE NEVERTHELESS GONE
ALONG WITH SAUDIS IN CONTINUING ARMS AND ECONOMIC
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AID AND DEFENDING GHASHMI IN PERSONAL CONTACTS
FROM CHARGES WHICH ARE UNPROVED OR UNLIKELY. WE
HAVE NO CHOICE. LOOKING BEYOND GHASHMI IS VERY
HARD. THE NEAR-TERM GAINS SEEM TO OUTWEIGH
POSSIBILITY LONG TERM LOSSES.END SUMMARY.

1. SEVERAL EMBASSY OFFICERS, INCLUDING AMBASSADOR
AND TWO DEFENSE ATTACHES, HAVE HAD SOCIAL AND
BUSINESS CONACTS WITH GHASHMI OVER THE LAST THREE
YEARS BUT WE KNOW LITTLE OF HIS BACKGROUND. HE WAS

19 WHEN THE REVOLUTION OCCURRED AND HAD RECEIVED SOME EDUCATION IN IMAMIC SCHOOLS IN HIS VILLAGE AND IN SANA. HE THUS CAN READ AND WRITE ARABIC, KNOWS THE QURAN, AND SOMETHING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF YEMEN AND ISLAM. ALSO, HE LATER RECEIVED SOME MILITARY TRAINING UNDER THE EGYPTIAN-SOVIET SYSTEM WHICH WAS RAPIDLY SET UP AFTER THE 1962 REVOLUTION. THIS TRAINING LED TO ARMORED ASSIGNMENTS AND SOME ROUGH FIGHTING DURING THE CIVIL WAR. THESE EPISODES GAINED HIM A SOLID REPUTATION FOR COURAGE AND COMMAND BUT NOT FOR TACTICS OR LOGISTICS. HE SEEMS TO SHARE THE GENERAL YEMENI NOTION OF A TANK AS A BIG RIFLE ON TRACKS. COMBINED ARMS OPERATIONS, SUSTAINING A LARGE FORCE IN THE FIELD, MAINTENANCE, TRAINING, BUDGETING AND ACCOUNTING, INTELLIGENCE, FORCE DEVELOPMENT ARE SUBJECTS WHICH HE HAS NEVER DISCUSSED WITH US, SO FAR AS WE KNOW, WITH ANYONE ELSE. IT IS SAFE TO SAY HE IS A MILITARY MAN WHO HAS DEMONSTRATED LAUDABLE APTITUDE IN STAND-UP-AND-SHOOT SITUATIONS, BUT IN NO OTHERS.

2. YEMENIS OF ALL STRIPES ADMIRE THESE MARTIAL VIRTUES BUT TECHNOCRATS CRINGE AT THE THOUGHT OF HAVING TO DISCUSS THE BUDGET, DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY, MINISTERIAL PLANS, SECRET

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POLITICAL TACTICS, FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH GHASHMI. HE IS NOT OVERBEARING, MERELY UNINTERESTED, AND ONE MAN SAID THAT THE YARG WILL SOON REFLECT THE ABSENCE OF THE INQUISITIVE AND DEMANDING QUESTIONS WHICH HAMDI USED TO DIRECT AT MINISTERS, THE INTEREST IN DETAIL WHICH HAMDI USED TO TAKE. MANY TECHNOCRATS SIMPLY SAY THAT GHASHMI IS "STUPID".

3. IT IS EASY TO SEE HOW HE GETS THIS REPUTATION. ONCE IN A DISCUSSION WITH US DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CLEMENTS ABOUT THE MARIB DAM, PARATROOP COMMANDER ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM RATHER ARROGANTLY NOTED THAT QURAN SAID MICE DESTROYED THE DAM AND THIS, OF COURSE, HAD HAD TO BE INTERPRETED ALLEGORICALLY, AND REALLY MEANT THAT GREED AND PERSONAL ADVANTAGE WERE ALLOWED IN THAT SOCIETY TO OVERCOME PUBLIC GOOD. GHASHMI REDDENED, AS HE OFTEN DOES WHEN HE CAN'T QUITE THINK OF WHAT TO SAY, AND GLARING AT GLIB ABDALLAH HE SHRUGGED AND SAID, WELL, MAYBE, BUT THE QURAN SAYS MICE DID IT. HE IS A PRACTICING MUSLIM WHO DOES NOT SMOKE, CHEW QAT OR DRINK. (THE LATTER INDULGENCE HE STOPPED AFTER DOCTORS WARNED HIM ABOUT HIS HEALTH; HE WILL SERVE ALCOHOL TO THOSE WHO DO DRINK, HOWEVER.)

4. THIS REFLECTS HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD AUTHORITY. HE ACCEPTS AND PROJECTS IT EASILY. ONLY THIRTY-FIVE, HE

LOOKS AND ACTS LIKE AN OLDER MAN. HE IS A BIT OVERWEIGHT. HIS BALDING HEAD IS USUALLY COVERED AT WORK WITH A HIGH-PEAKED GARRISON HAT WHICH ALWAYS LOOKS AWKWARD, PARTICULARLY WHEN COMPARED WITH THE SOFT GRACE AND NATURAL LINES OF A TURBAN OR A KAFIYEH. HIS FACE IS LINED AND UNPREPOSSESSING. HE WEARS AN INCH-WIDE MOUSTACHE JUST BELOW HIS NOSE, UNUSUAL IN YEMEN AND FAINTLY COMIC. HE LAUGHS EASILY, THOUGH IT SOMETIMES COMES OUT AS A GIGGLE. IN SHORT, HE HAS
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NONE OF THE LAN AND YOUTHFUL DASH OF HIS PRESUMED COLLEAGUE ABDALLAH ABDAL ALIM. HE SEEMS IN FACT TO HAVE RISEN TO SUCH HIGH ESTATE SIMPLY BECAUSE ARMORED UNITS ARE THE KEY TO COUPS AND HIS COMMAND OF HIS MEN AND READY LOYALTY MADE HIM AN INVALUABLE ALLY OF POLITICAINS. WE CANNOT THINK OF ANY ISSUE WHICH HE DISPUTED WITH HIS MENTOR, IBRAHIM AL-HAMDI, AND CAN THINK OF DOZENS OF TIMES WHEN HE TOLD US THIS OR THAT WAS SOMETHING HE WOULD HAVE TO RAISE WITH IBRAHIM.

5. YET THERE IS MORE TO GHASHMI AS A LEADER THAN MEETS THE EYE. HE IS THE BROTHER OF THE LEADING SHAYKH OF THE HAMADAN TRIBES, ONE OF FIVE MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE KEY HASHID CONFEDERATION WHICH ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN PRETENDS TO LEAD. LIKE HIS BROTHER HE WAS RAISED IN A FAMILY WHICH DECIDED INNUMERABLE DISPUTES ABOUT WATER, INHERITANCES, MARRIAGE, LAND OWNERSHIP. SHAYKHS IN NORTHERN YEMEN DO NOT DEPEND SO MUCH ON ISLAMIC LAW FOR SUCH MATTERS AS ON LOCAL CUSTOM AND TRIBAL LAW, AND WHILE SHAYKHLY POWER TENDS TO RUN IN FAMILIES LIKE GHASHMI'S IT IS ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE CONSENT OF THE TRIBAL MEMBERS. GHASHMI HAS, 5#343*943, A STRONG SENSE OF FEUDAL AUTHORITY AND OBLIGATION. IT COMES OUT CLEARLY IN THE WAY HE RUNS HIS BUDGET, DOLING OUT FUNDS GENEROUSLY TO FAVORED OFFICERS AND USING LESSER GIFTS TO INDUCE LOYALTY IN OTHERS. GHASHMI GRANDLY DISPENSED HOUSES, LAND, CARS, MEDICAL TREATMENT ABROAD, LEAVES, BUILDING FUNDS FOR UNIT NEEDS, NEW WEAPONS AND OTHER BENEFITS IN THE INIMITABLE MANNER OF THE PENINSULA. HIS OWN HOUSE IS LAVISH BEYOND ANYONE ELSE'S IN THE LAND. STILL NO ONE HAS INTERFERED MUCH IN HIS ADMINISTRATION OF THE MILITARY, EVEN HAMDI WHO RELIED ON HIM TO KEEP THE ARMY IN
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LINE. CIVILIANS MIGHT GRIMACE AT THE WAY THE CUT WAS MADE BETWEEN THE CIVILIAN AND MILITARY SHARES OF THE BUDGET -- THE MILITARY WAS GIVEN FUNDS FOR 40,000 MEN, MANY IMAGINARY --- BUT THERE WAS NO CALL FOR ACCOUNTING

OVERSIGHT OR DEBATE OF NATIONAL PRIORITIES. GHASHMI REPRESENTS A RECOGNIZED TYPE OF SEIGNEURIAL LEADERSHIP IN YEMEN AND EVEN TECHNOCRATS ADMIRE IT OR FEAR IT ENOUGH TO SUPPRESS COMPLAINTS.

6. GHASHMI'S SENSE OF POWER IS COUPLED WITH A SHREWDNESS AND FIRMNESS IN PERSONAL DEALINGS THAT IS IMPRESSIVE. (HE HAS ALMOST NO PUBLIC SENSE. HE IS NOT A GOOD SPEAKER, WITH NO PERSONALITY APPEARING THROUGH CRACKS IN THE BOMBAST. HAMDI, BY CONTRAST, THOUGH VERY LOW KEY, WAS ADROIT IN MANIPULATING THE FEELINGS OF A CROWD.) IN PRIVATE HAMDI WAS OFTEN SARDONIC, CUTTING, OVERBEARING. SHASHMI IS WARM, ATTENTIVE, NATURAL, HUMOROUS, FIRM IN PRIVATE DEALINGS. HE MAKES DECISIONS QUICKLY AND ISSUES CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS TO GET THINGS DONE. HE RUNS PEOPLE IN AND OUT OF HIS OFFICE ON TIGHT SCHEDULES.. HE DOESN'T TALK MUCH, JUST DECIDES THE QUESTION PUT TO HIM, AND GOES ON TO THE NEXT PERSON. HE CUTS OFF COMPLAINTS WITH SWIFT SALLIES WHICH COMBINE HUMOR WITH SHARP INSIGHT.

7. GHASHMI'S POLITICAL VIEWS ARE CONSIDERABLY TO RIGHT OF HAMDI'S HE HAS TOLD US WITHOUT APPARENT HYPERBOLE THAT HE CONSIDERS SOUTH YEMEN "THE DIRTIEST GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD." HAVING FOUGHT IN THE 1973 WAR AGAINST ADENI FORCES, AND WATCHED WITH QUIET CONTEMPT WHILE SOUTHERNERS CLOSED MOSQUES, SCHOOLS AND BUSINESSES, GHASHMI IS NOT LIKELY TO TOLERATE AN UPSURGE IN POLITICAL SUBVERSION BY RADICALS. HAMDI EQUIVOCATED WITH THE SOUTH, PROMISING MUCH, PROTESTING LITTLE, AND SECRET

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GENERALLY SUCCEEDED, IN CONTEXT OF SUADI EFFORTS TO WOO SOUTH, IN WINNING REDUCTION OF SOUTHERN HOSTILITY AND POLITICAL AGITATION IN NORTH. HAMDI USED ISSUE OF YEMENI UNITY TO DRAW ADENIS INTO EMBRACE WHICH THEY MIGHT FIND IT EMBARRASSING TO GET OUT OF. GHASHMI'S REACTION IS PROBABLY GOING TO BE, AT BEST, ARM'S LENGTH DEALINGS INTERSPERSED WITH ANGRY CRACKDOWNS. AS HE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON OCTOBER 12, "THE LEFT KNOWS WHAT TO EXPECT OF ME."

8. GHASHMI'S VIEWS, LIKE HAMDI'S ARE VERY INSULAR. HAMDI LET HIMSELF BE PERSUADED BY ABDALLAH AL-ASNAJ TO TAKE INITIATIVES IN THE ARABLEAGUE AND MAKE CHIEF OF STATE VISITS TO DRAW THE LIMELIGHT HOWEVER BRIEFLY TO YEMEN, BUT LIKE HAMDI, GHASHMI REALLY SEEMS TO HAVE HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN WORLD OR ARAB AFFAIRS WHICH DO NOT IMMEDIATELY IMPINGE ON YEMEN. EVEN NOW THAT PHYSICAL ISOLATION HAS CRUMBLLED, INTELLECTUAL

ISOLATION OF YEMENIS IS STARTLING. GHASHMI USUALLY CANNOT MENTION PALESTINIANS WITHOUT ADDING, IN A COLORFUL ARAB EXPRESSION, MAY GOD WRECK THEIR HOUSE. HIS VIEW OF WORLD DIPLOMACY SEEMS TO BE LIMITED TO HIS DISLIKE OF SOVIETS AND ADMIRATION FOR AMERICANS.

9. WE ARE NOT CERTAIN WHAT GHASHMI'S ATTITUDES ARE LIKELY TO BE TOWARD NORTHERN TRIBES, ALTHOUGH RELIABLE SOURCES SAY HE WILL BE EVEN FIRMER THAN HAMDI. HE IS A SHAYKH BUT HE HAS POINTED OUT WITH ACID THAT HE AND HIS BROTHER HAVE MORE CLAIM TO TRIBAL PREEMINENCE THAN ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN AL-AHMAR. THE SAUDIS HERE SAY FRANKLY THEY DO NOT KNOW IF GHASHMI WILL HONOR THE AGREEMENT WHICH HAMDI HAD REPORTEDLY WORKED OUT WITH
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ABDALLAH BIN HUSAYN. WE THINK HE WILL CONTINUE HAMDI'S DRIVE TO STRENGTHEN THE POWERS OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AT EXPENSE OF SHAYKHS.

10. GHASHMI LIKES THE SAUDIS AND THEY LIKE HIM. THEY DON'T SAY HE'S SMART BUT THEY DO SAY HE IS HONEST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD IN LAND WHERE DUPLICITY DRIVES THEM MAD. SAUDIS ARE ALSO SAYING THAT HAMDI IS GREAT LOSS TO THEM BECAUSE THEY DOUBT GHASHMI CAN STAY ON TOP OF MANY FACTIONS AND PERSONALITIES HERE, BUT THEY REALLY DIDN'T LIKE OR TRUST HAMDI VERY MUCH DESPITE HIS INVALUABLE POLITICAL SKILLS. SAUDIS HERE TELL US THEY ARE MAKING NO DEMANDS OF GHASHMI AT MOMENT, MERELY SUGGESTING THAT HE AVOID QUARRELS AND PURGES AND TRY TO RECONCILE PEOPLE TO HIS RULE. THEY ARE GOING TO CONTINUE AID OF ALL FORMS AND WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT USG AMMO SHIP WHICH SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE OCT 19 WOULD UNLOAD ITS CARGO ROUTINELY. WE GUESS, THEREFORE, THAT MILITARY AID WILL CONTINUE, PROBABLY EXPENDING AS PLANNED, INTO AIR FORCE. SUBSIDY MIGHT EVEN RISE TO TIDE OVER YEMENIS IN CRITICAL PERIOD.

11. SOVIETS ARE IN FOR ROUGH BLOW IF GHASHMI MAKES IT THROUGH FIRST MONTH OR SO. THEY ARE PRESENTLY LYING LOW AND REPORTEDLY QUITE ALARMED. GHASHMI HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO REPEAT WHAT HE HAS SAID ALL ALONG, THAT HE WILL CAST OUT SOVIETS AS SOON AS HE CAN. HE DOES NOT RPT NOT WANT TO LOSE HIS MILITARY CAPABILITY IN THE PROCESS BUT WILL GO AS FAST AS REPLACEMENT WEAPONS CAN BE FOUND. WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO SCALE DOWN THE COMMUNIST EMBASSIES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MISSIONS TOO, AND MAYBE CHUCK OUT A FEW MORE OBVIOUS INTELLIGENCE COLLECTORS, BUT HE WON'T WANT TO BREAK ALL RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS UNTIL HE HAS

SUFFICIENT EQUIPMENT ON HAND.

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12. ON ECONOMIC POLICY, NO ONE IN THE EMBASSY CAN RECALL ANY COMMENT OR FLICKER OF INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT FROM GHASHMI. HIS SENSE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IS QUITE WELL-DEVELOPED, HOWEVER, AND HE WILL WANT FOREIGN COMPANIES AND PRIVATE YEMENI COMPANIES TO WORK WITHOUT MUCH INTERFERENCE FROM THE STATE. HE WILL HAVE NO RPT NO IDEAS ON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY EXCEPT THAT SOMEHOW IT MUST DEAL WITH MONUMENTS AND LOCAL LEADERS RATHER THAN WITH POOREST OF POOR AND RURAL WORKS. WE DON'T THINK THIS IS NECESSARILY A BAD VIEW TO TAKE OF DEVELOPMENT IN A COUNTRY WITH AS LITTLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND AS MANY DIVISIONS AS YEMEN.

13. THE ONLY PROBLEM WE HAVE WITH GHASHMI AS CHIEF OF STATE IS A CONCERN THAT HE CANNOT SURVIVE. HIS LACK OF POLITICAL ACUMEN ON A NATIONAL SCALE AND NARROW CONCERN WITH SECURITY CREATES A SERIOUS DILEMMA FOR HIM IN A COUNTRY WITH SO MANY FACTIONS AND SO FEW ALTERNATIVES. YEMEN IS DIVIDED BY SECT, REGION, TRIBE AND LIVELIHOOD AS WELL AS POLITICAL PERSUASION. HAMDI PLAYED ROLE OF MAN IN THE MIDDLE. IT WORKED SO LONG, SO WELL THAT MANY THINK THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE, PARTICULARLY SINCE ARMED CONFLICT IS SO EASY TO PROVOKE HERE. FOR INSTANCE, FEW THINK, ON THE HAND, THAT THASHMI CAN OR WANTS TO GET ALONG VERY LONG WITH SOUTHERNER AND MODERATE LEFTIST PARATROOP COMMANDER ABDULLAH ABDAL ALIM. FALL OUT BETWEEN THESE TWO MEN COULD STILL TRIGGER LEFT-RIGHT STRUGGLE IN YEMEN WITH SECTONAL OVERTONES. (SAUDIS AND SOUTH YEMENIS MAY INDEED BE PREPARED TO SEE THIS KIND OF CONFLICT OCCUR.) GHASHMI, MOREOVER, COMES TO OFFICE IN A CLOUD OF SUSPICION WHICH HE WILL PROBABLY BE UNABLE TO ENTIRELY DISPEL. THREAT OF
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ASSASSINATION IS EXCELLENT. WHILE TECHNOCRATS ARE PRESENTLY RALLYING TO HIM AS THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO INSTABILITY, THEY WILL HAVE LESS ACCESS AND INFLUENCE ON GHASHMI THAN THEY DID TO INQUISITIVE AND IMAGINATIVE IBRAHIM AL-HAMDI, AND MAY SOON GROW FURSTRATED WITH ADMINISTRATIVE STYLE OF A SHAYKH.

14. THUS, HIS EARLY SUCCESS IN NARROW FIELD OF SECURITY --- HOLDING ARMY TOGETHER FOR FIRST WEEK -- MAY NOT BE ENOUGH AS WEEKS ROLL BY AND POLITICAL TASKS OF RE-STARTING GOVERNMENT AND WINNING CONFIDENCE GROW MORE AND MORE ACUTE. STILL, HE WILL HAVE SOME

POTENT ADVANTAGES, FIRST AND FOREMOST THE PACIFYING
FLOODS OF MONEY COMING IN FROM SAUDI ARABIA IN PRIVATE
AND PUBLIC CHANNELS. PERHAPS MUCH OF HAMD'I'S SUCCESS
WAS REALLY DUE TO THIS RATHER THAN TO POLITICAL
ADROITNESS, AND NO ONE WILL WANT A PERIOD OF
INSTABILITY WHICH WOULD INTERRUPT A PALPABLY IMPROVING
WAY OF LIFE BECAUSE OF IDEOLOGICAL OR PERSONAL
QUALMS ABOUT GHASHMI.

15. WE ARE ALSO UNSURE IF SOUTH YEMEN WOULD REALLY
GO TOO FAR AGAINST NORTH. THEY SUFFERED GREATLY
IN 1973 WAR AND PROBABLY DON'T WANT TO TURN BACK
CLOCK WHEN SAUDI FINANCIAL AID AND TRANSIT TRADE
TO YAR THROUGH THE ADEN PORT IS PROMISING TO MEAN
SO MUCH FOR DEPRESSED ECONOMY OF PDY.

16. FINALLY, GHASHMI PROBABLY WILL NOT FIND THE
SAUDIS PUSHING TRIBAL INTERESTS AT HIM AS HARD AS
AT HAMD'I. SAUDIS ARE WORRIED. THEY DON'T WANT
INSTABILITY HERE. LEFTIST SPECTRE WHICH COULD
ARISE FROM CHAOS -- AS IN ETHIOPIA -- BRINGS TO
MIND POLITICAL AND MILITARY THREATS WHICH YEMEN
POSED TO KINGDOM IN SIXTIES. SO GHASHMI MAY GET A
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VACATION FROM FOREIGN PRESSURE AS WELL AS EVEN MORE
GENEROUS FINANCIAL BACKING.

17. BUT WE AREN'T AT ALL SURE. OUR CONSENSUS IS THAT
WE ARE ENTERING PERIOD OF INSTABILITY, A SHARP DIS-
APPOINTMENT AFTER PROSPECTS WHICH HAMD'I HAD OPENED UP.
AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, WE ARE CONTINUING ALL PROGRAMS
(MILITARY AND CIVILIAN) AND ALIGNING OURSELVES CLOSELY
WITH SAUDIS IN HELPING TO SECURE GHASHMI'S SURVIVAL.
THERE IS STILL POSSIBQWITY EVIDENCE WILL SHOW THAT
GHASHMI WAS MURDERER BUT IN ANY CASE HE WILL PROBABLY
NEVER COMPLETELY EXONERATE HIMSELF IN PUBLIC EYE.
WE WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITH HIM, HOWEVER, THIS IS
OUR POLICY DILEMMA.
SCOTES UNQUOTE VANCE

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